

Extension exercises

Chapter 6: Comparatives and superlatives | Comments

How learners use English

People are often surprised to discover how much disagreement there can be on some of these points.

In a study of 30 people, everyone considered the following to be incorrect.

- (i) In this superlative statement *most* has to be used instead of *more*.

In the same study, these sentences were considered dubious or incorrect, with the following explanations.

- (ii) *quicker* is an adjective form. Some people prefer *more quickly* (or *faster*).
- (iii) People usually try to avoid using the subject pronoun in this position. They prefer *faster than me* or *faster than I do*. Some people consider this incorrect.
- (iv) People usually prefer *older* to *more old*.
- (v) People usually prefer *more pleasant* to *pleasanter*.
- (xii) People usually prefer *quickest* to *most quick*.
- (xiii) People usually prefer *in to of*.

Some people feel that (ix) is dubious (the use of *more* rather than *most*). However, this is quite normal where *of the two of them* is implied.

Exploring English

- 1 It is quite difficult to find natural contexts in which a lot of comparative and superlative forms are used together, and you may find that many comparisons are made without the use of these forms.
- 2 Many of the comparative forms are likely to be followed by *than ...*, although this is also often only implied.
- 3 Comparative forms often are followed by *in ...* or by a relative clause, but it is difficult to predict what you will find in the text you choose.
- 4 It is difficult to predict the answer to this question.
- 5 Most native speakers of English generally weaken *er*, *est* and *than*. The /t/ in *est* often disappears, particularly before consonants.

Course materials

- 1 The comparative and superlative forms of adjectives are often introduced at an elementary level. The comparative and superlative forms of adverbs are often introduced at a pre-intermediate level. The use of *more* and *most* with nouns and noun phrases is often 'slipped in' together with their use with long adjectives.
- 2 Many courses choose to give clear, concrete rules of thumb (for example, 'use *er* and *est* with all one-syllable adjectives'), at least at the lower levels. These can't be entirely accurate in interpreting all the ways we use the forms. Most courses wouldn't aim to be comprehensive. They prefer to present the relevant

information a little at a time. In some courses the choices we make with two syllable adjectives are glossed over.

- 3 This is often taken for granted and receives little or no attention.
- 4 At lower levels, examples are often chosen that provide a very narrow view of how we use these forms.
- 5 This varies greatly from course to course.
- 6 This varies greatly from course to course.
- 7 Attention is often paid to a useful selection of ways of intensifying and qualifying these forms at intermediate-upper intermediate level.
- 8 Few materials provide much opportunity of this kind.
- 9 Most materials provide opportunities for practising these forms. This practice is sometimes rather contrived (it may involve 'transforming' sentences, or writing short texts with an unnaturally very high concentration of comparative and/or superlative forms).